

Blackfoot River TMDL Implementation Plan

assembled by:

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“Take a good look Missus” came a heated tone from the drover! “This is the last big herd you’ll see commin’ through this country. And it’s all because of you (settlers)!”

Hatasu Oleson heard the drovers message as she stood in her doorway watching the big herd of cattle move. She and her husband, Leo, had settled above the Blackfoot Marsh in 1919. Large herds of cattle had been trailed through Wyoming, Utah and Idaho for years to graze the open grass country. Settlers were establishing themselves in this new country and making changes to this tradition. Each year settlers grazed the early spring grass before the big herds came through and then put their livestock back out after the herds left. Drovers saw the open range being parceled and may have noticed the grass being depleted and so, changed their lifestyle. Living is changing! This is a story of changes in our watershed.

The Shoshones lived in and traveled this region early on with trappers joining to harvest the fur bearing wealth. Trappers tell of large beaver ponds, the dams stretching a mile long across a valley or several stair-stepped dams running down deep draws. In the 1930s through the 1950s beaver numbers dwindled seriously, enough so that the state hired staff to manage them. In the 1950’s, 10,000 muskrats were trapped from Greys Lake. These pelts were money makers and often the animals were considered pests by early settlers.

In 1834 by Nathaniel Wyeth established the Fort Hall fur trading post/way station, then sold it to the Hudson Bay Company in 1838 & used it until 1852. The Lander Trail, an alternate route for the Oregon Trail, passed South of Greys Lake, over Chub Flat, through Wilson’s Pass and across the Badger Knoll area, to the Fort Hall Way Station. In 1859 alone, 13,000 people in 3,000 wagons with 50,000 head of livestock used the Lander Trail. Settlers were establishing themselves along creeks and springs throughout the Blackfoot Mountains earning a living with small sawmills, through fur trapping, livestock grazing, haying meadow grass and farming.

In 1866 the Fort Hall Reservation was established, encouraging the Shoshones and Bannocks to change their culture of hunting and foraging to farming. The Reservation Canal, also known as the Government Canal, gave Fort Hall its first amount of irrigation water - not enough! Early treaty rights overlooked the amount of water needed to farm reservation acres, and in 1907 the “Winters Case” allotted an even distribution of water rights to tribes. This germinated the “Fort Hall Project” of an irrigation system for the reservation. The Blackfoot dam, completed in 1921, converted the Blackfoot marsh into the Blackfoot Reservoir, yet there still was insufficient water for all farmable acres on the reservation, and to fill other granted water rights. A canal, Clarks Cut, was made from Greys Lake to Meadow Creek to bring more water into the Blackfoot Reservoir, which then supplied sufficient amounts for everyone.

In 1905 the National Forest Service and State Land Departments were formed. Both agencies support multiple use of these lands. The world’s richest phosphate mines are in the Caribou National Forest.

As it became clear that the livestock routes to summer range, across the west, were being jeopardized by white settlement, in 1916 National Congress designated these as legal livestock trailways. Western Land Boards that managed grazing lands and trailways reformed into the Bureau of Land Management in 1946.

These new people in the west weren't aware of the western climate nor were they documenting this early landscape. They were awed and comforted by this land. Communities of people were growing and doing their best to take care of the land while practices were quietly changing the landscape. A holy man once said about America, "Each nation, like each individual, has a theme in this life, which is its center, the principle note found which every other note comes to form the harmony." In the United States the principle note was a mixture of enormous practicality and a belief that nothing is impossible. These settlers were magnifying this point.

Irrigation canals, pumps and school consolidation encouraged settlers to move from the hills to the Snake River Plains to make an easier living. Runoff water from the high country became more beneficial, with the development of reservoirs, to assure irrigation water and to stop flooding. People came to believe that spring water naturally "flushes" through a "watershed".

Notice was taken of water quality during these changes, and some began looking seriously at how it, and wildlife, and the regions water cycle were being affected by this changed scheme. Western folks became concerned with how streams were degrading. The spotlight focused on water quality and its effects on fisheries. New knowledge was generated on how to take better care of streams. Notice was made of "non-point source" pollution and the lands "water cycle".

Riparian plants and brush hold stream banks in place, keeping bank soil from polluting streams, filtering runoff and holding water to release back to the stream as the flows decrease in the later summer. A canopy of riparian brush keeps water cooler to deter moss growth and support fisheries. Plant density captures and holds rainfall while healthy root systems incorporate organic litter into the soil.

This region's folks are adjusting their management strategies to support this subtle change of knowledge about moisture. Some farmers are testing "direct seeding", where the ground is left untilled for planting or harvesting.

This changed practice keeps more organic litter in the topsoil to take advantage of any precipitation available. A 3 fold increase of organic litter has 4 times the water holding capacity or – 4% to 5% organic litter can hold up to 195 pounds of water in a three square foot of soil.

Many livestock producers are rotating livestock through their range to allow "recovery" of the grass plant for better "plant density". Folks along the Blackfoot River and tributaries are adjusting their practices to allow riparian areas to recover. Some folks are educating themselves and monitoring their land and streams to determine how best to

improve their landscape and its health. Much is being done through public land and agricultural agencies to reestablish a healthier water system throughout the watersheds. These actions hold moisture in soil creating a defined “watercatchment” as opposed to a “watershed”.

Wendell Berry, a farmer, Professor at U of Kentucky and author, states that;
“We and our country create one another, depend on one another, are literally part of one another; that our land passes in and out of our bodies as we pass in and out of our land; that as we and our land are part of one another, so all who are living as neighbors here, human, plant and animal are part of one another and cannot flourish alone. Our culture must be our response to our place.”

Living our desires is an ongoing process of learning and changing. This Blackfoot River TMDL is a part of this process of change. We use it as a part of our adjustment, neighbor to neighbor to continue to improve our living in this place.

by Charlotte Reid
Blackfoot River Watershed Council

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Introduction

Offered herein is the Blackfoot River Total Maximum Daily Load Implementation Plan. All sections were prepared by parties subject to implementation of the plan. These parties represent the major contributors to loads affecting beneficial uses in the Blackfoot River. Their plans are included as submitted except for changes explained below. No attempts were made to modify the plans in either content or grammar.

Please note that in copying the individually submitted plans, some changes were made to accommodate distribution of the plan. For example, any pages with color are now simply black and white. Figures that were presented on paper greater than letter size (e.g., 11 in by 17 in) were reduced to 8.5 in by 11 in.